

## ROBERT FROST'S POETRY: ADVOCATING THE SENSE OF DUTY

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### ABSTRACT

Robert Frost's mellifluous poems are having much impact on literature as they comprise thought provoking themes uttered with amazing diction enclosing superb driving force of imagination. Alike other poets, he has a mess of familiar themes; nature, love, life, death, relationship, responsibility, lack of communication and so on where the most palpable one is 'duty'. His unflinching call towards the eternal duty of human life has got immense importance throughout his writing as people are destined to perform them all. Frost's call to reshape duty is to seek the resonance of life and to get its real value through myriads of task. The purpose of this article is to sort out those significant works talking about duty so that the readers can muse on these interpretations. Furthermore, it may explore Frost's dominant theme 'duty' as a bright lantern to walk through the vulnerable ways of life.

**KEYWORDS:** Robert Frost's Poetry, Advocating Sense, Duty

The idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, is to the moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life. No man can begin to mould himself on a faith or an idea without rising to a higher order of experience: a principle of subordination, of self-mastery, has been introduced into his nature; he is no longer a mere bundle of impressions, desires, and impulses.

GEORGE ELIOT, *Janet's Repentance*

### INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost's poetry has been charmingly successful to attract the worthy attention of critics worldwide; since his art has enormous, unparallel and unorthodox impact in the vast world of literature having mere positive force of regenerating the postmodern period with a subtle and intense scrutiny. This unconventional master minder has a sheer trial to rescue the damaged humanity of modern people who are yet plunged in hopelessness, frustration, futility and moreover in total pessimism. His poetry has layers of meaning to be read and interpreted throughout different earthly eras. The themes of Frost's poetry are carrying commendable connotative messages impregnated by a number of major and unavoidable aspects of fragmentary human life; having full driving force to insert meaning to an individual soul, to ponder on the value of living as an individual and to release oneself from inner poverty. Robert Penn Warren marks his poetry as "suggestive" and "haunting" because "all good poems, even the simplest work is like dropping a stone into the pool of our being, and the ripples spread (1947)." Being segregated from usual thought, Robert Frost has talked about the common people unfolding the truths of life. Alike other poets, he has carried the 'stream of consciousness' through the divine power of imagination which made his journey easier as a commendable mouthpiece of society alike his contemporary poets Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), Frank O' Hara (1926-1966), Ezra Pound (1885-1972) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892). ([http://classiclitr.about.com/od/literaryterms/g/aa\\_stream.htm](http://classiclitr.about.com/od/literaryterms/g/aa_stream.htm)). Richard Gray states, "Clearing and wilderness, law and freedom, civilization and nature, fact and dream: These oppositions reverberate

throughout American writing (1990).” So, Frost has the apparent aptitude to present the ambiguous matters of life in a very lucid and lucrative manner which indubitably has the quality to convince the readers to sort the unseen, excellent and optimistic meanings out of this material world.

Frost’s eloquence of diction has been granted many times since it is mentioned that he “liberated American poets by proving the potential success of traditional forms, even during a period when form was giving way to free verse under the influence of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound (2011)”. Moreover, “a reveal in the felicities of language’ is observed in his excellent choice of themes spurred by brilliant use of images with creditable symbols creating some extra addiction to his poetry (1984). His multitudinous unparallel themes like priceless patriotism, unavoidable truism of life, precious hard work, ultimate negative impact of lack of communication, value of love, divine healing power of nature, never alterable taste of duty, positive output of taking responsibility, significance of worthy leisure and unalterable value of relationship as well as many more have eliminated the curtain of confusion about the goal of this worldly life and gifted it a firm shape through numeral functions. Among these themes, the constantly discussed theme ‘duty’ has appeared many times in his poems by taking different approaches while talking about miscellaneous tasks of life and concurrently made the critics busy to talk on it.

This paper has an utter purpose in cataloguing the numerous ways in which Robert Frost succeeded to make the audience contemplate on ‘duty’.

## DISCUSSIONS

The unique notion of bringing nature in life chores is once again unfolded through Frost’s ‘Mowing’. It is a sole piece of art, a nature lyric, an ode to hardship where a simple tool scythe is working as an irreversible symbol representing the concept of labor by encapsulating the power of hard work. According to Robert Penn Warren, in ‘Mowing’, the ravishing truth is the ‘sweetest dream that labor knows’ since ‘the action and the reward cannot be defined separately, man must fulfill himself, in action’ (1947). A blatant similarity is obvious between labor and success as using the scythe, a person is getting immense importance because that tool is whispering to console him even in the most hostile weather and revealing the value of getting something through glorious toil. This scythe is also discarding easy success to interleave significance to an individual’s life, to give him an identity, a position, a divine honor, a taste of success, moreover an urge to live as a valuable entity.

The excellent paradoxical lines are illuminating the ever fixed nature of hardship: “Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak.” Keeping the belief in mind that, labor is quiet similar to pray, Lawrence Thompson talks about the immediate joy of becoming one individual rather than taking part in the process of being only (1942). Lastly, this hymn unfolds the philosophy of life too as it has focused on the dual existence of beauty and beast in nature. This significance has a solid push up to shake human minds on the way to distinguish and sort out all the splendor of life out of the monstrous facet. This capability of setting apart is undoubtedly a clear branding of the value of human life. Only completing duty through sincere toil can give success as it elevates a person headed for blissful piety.

The beauty of work is once again truly depicted in Robert Frost’s ‘The Ax-Helve’ where it is clearly mentioned that the incomparable joy, blissful pride and the sparkling beauty come out of own creation. This sense of duty mingled in own task greatly differentiate between machine made products and the product that comes out of own toil. The stunning procedure of being an artist is apparently revealed in these magical lines:

He liked to have it the wood used slender as a whipstock,  
 Free from the least knot, equal to the strain  
 Of bending like a sword across the knee.  
 He showed me that the lines of a good helve  
 Were native to the grain before the knife  
 Expressed them, and its curves were no false curves  
 Put on it from without. And there its strength lay  
 For the hard work.

Here, Frost's ultimate message is to shake conscience and to raise awareness of the innate aesthetic beauty that each one is carrying silently. Simultaneously, this poem has a subtle call to boost up love and sincerity on own job discarding all sort of negative forces like laziness and pessimism. Unlike "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", "The Ax-Helve" is as well 'dramatizing the artist's negotiation of the responsibilities of his craft (1997).' But, later on it is revealed that a true worker is always an inestimable artist who lives on the ecstasy of his creation since this mesmerizing fact is evident in this blank verse.

Robert Frost's all-inclusive poetic vision and persona do not allow him to consider a person's attempt to take rest such simplistically, rather the attempt to have leisure mentioned in 'After Apple-Picking' is having deep meaning poured with the thought of incomplete duty. Alike the enchanting hymn 'Mowing', 'After Apple-Picking' is also a symbolic poem, "a masterpiece", "so poised", "so subtle" and "so poetically coherent" in carrying the glory of complete duty (1947). Here, the person's wish for hibernation is not getting easy access due to his incomplete task. This poem is impregnated with two fold meaning since in one side apparently it talks about his urge of sleeping. This drowsiness is because apple-picking is done from the person's point of view though a barrel is yet waiting to be filled up with apple. This lethargy is constantly putting questions; "What is the nature of this dream world? And what is its relation to the literal world, the world of real apples and the arching instep arch and the real woodchuck (1947)?" On the other hand, this simple attempt to sleep is representing preparation for death as the worldly tasks are seemed to be done. In fact, the pleasurable part is only coming out of the completed task while the empty barrels are irritating for getting rest. Here, the mechanism is fully associated with the essence of duty that is yet to be done as it is stated: 'And I could tell/What form my dreaming was about to take. /Magnified apples appear and disappear, /Stem end and blossom end, / And every fleck of russet showing clear (p. 69).' Consequently, duty or task has got the utmost importance because the sense of performing enough duty is confirming the countryman that he has had enough hardship that can eventually take him to a ceaseless sweet dream.

Segregating this transient tiredness, "Birches" shows the excellent mingling of earthly tasks and celestial journey towards heaven. The swinger of birches is undoubtedly the representative of human life which works as an excellent metaphor standing for self-discovery, theme of affirmation and the beauty of this earth. Absence of love, faith, true relationship, truth and many more life fuels of this materialistic world makes us tired and creates pessimism to take part in the worldly affairs as well as hampers the longing for being here anymore. Moreover, this frequent cynicism drives us to momentary escape just like the swingers of birches seeking a probable trespass to heaven because: 'life is too much like a pathless wood/Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs/Broken across it, and one eye is weeping (p. 82)'.

But this transitory escapism doesn't last long since the personified Truth comes to soothe and to affirm the betterment of having aspiration than to comprise nothing at all. Even in this abstruse world, it is possible to seek meaning through firm duties which offers us immense joy: 'I'd like to get away from earth awhile/ and then come back to it and begin over.' Thrusting aside the ashes, it is pretty feasible to seek happiness as Frost is composing: 'Earth's the right place for love (p.82)' No one will be seeking love in heaven; no other place will be offering this huge scope of fulfillment that comes out of performing terrestrial duties. So, Frost's desire of climbing has an obvious aim to revisit as earth is the place to foster abstracts like love, faith, sympathy, hope, piety, divinity and many more to spread the magnitude of humanity. Frost's intellectual depiction of the picturesque words as it is mentioned through 'Birches', finally leads us to meditate about the ultimate reality.

Robert Lee Frost's nonconformist and unorthodox view about conveying respect to other human beings is revealed through his frequently praiseworthy dramatic monologue 'The Death of the Hired Man.' Inner salvation is often affiliated with apparently minute tasks which are actually of great value for boosting up one's self-respect. Actually this poem has layers of meaning talking about doing justice and showing mercy to the decrepit while lack of performing these tasks can plunge someone in total failure discarding the utter value of being a human. Concurrently, this masterpiece of art gives the ever thought provoking definition of 'home' as it is mentioned in Mary's words: 'I should have called it/ Something you somehow haven't to deserve (p.48).' These lines clarify and unfold the real meaning of home which can create relation beyond blood connection. The connotation of home is not only a dwelling place rather it has more intense value and plain affiliation with giving someone beyond what he deserves. Concomitantly, these lines are pointing to the obligations of the owners of any home. Considering a person with all his follies is the ultimate duty to a certain person who is calling someone's place 'home'. What if someone is not considered? The answer is heart touchingly depicted in this monologue as the call of duty is not answered on time and finally all these sufferings of that decrepit are countered through the cold shadow of death which eventually throws Mary and Warren into a state of trauma. The decisive message of this poem is a clear sharp knock to awaken our slumbered sense of duty as they could not show proper justice and mercy on due time. This overtone of showing mercy and sympathy to the weak or frail ones is an inseparable duty of human life as it has earlier been mentioned through 'Ancient Mariner' by Coleridge (p. 744). The symbolic punishment mentioned in 'The Ancient Mariner' is representing the motion of disaster one faces out of his frivolity.

'The Gift Outright' is a poem talking about the universal theme of patriotism. It is echoing another contemporary poet Walt Whitman while talking about the invisible tie that a certain countrymen usually have concerning their country. Though both of the personalities are belongings of America, but, at the same time they replete with patriotism amid all of the inhabitants of earth. So, this poem can easily be said an excellent masterpiece reforming the sense of duty as well as boosting up new commitments towards own country. Here, Robert Frost has undeniably an inward look to the hidden patriotism of one's own being searching for the unconventional piety during fulfilling numerous duties to motherland. Scattered throughout his poetry, Robert Frost is tracing holiness from the same phenomenal world as he is "much more concerned with earthly existence" where a person dwells (2011)". So, here lies the urge to enrich the inner faculties unfolding the subtle happiness emerged with duty.

Robert Penn Warren heaves the message about the opening lines of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" that, it is a contrast between the sensitive and the intensive man, the man who uses the world and the man who

contemplates the world (1947).” This poem conceived by the just mentioned philosophy of life, is probably the most discussed somber anecdote driven by gripping diction since the concluding notes have got the utmost utterance:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep (p. 130).

The above mentioned mysterious wood is an excellent synecdoche representing the mystery, frustration and hopelessness of life where we might get stuck numerous times and later come back to the usual pathway to complete the yet unfinished journey. Because, everyday social affairs are the proving grounds of one's efficiency as it is mentioned in Richard Poirier's writing, "He is, after all, a man of business who has promised his future to other people. It would appear that he is not only a scheduled man but a fairly convivial one (1977)." This poem has a magical snatch towards worldly duties with pretty optimism as Guy Rotella expresses that it is an unsettled certitude poured with two folded attraction emphasizing repetitive tedium that makes the woods an attractive alternative to those responsibilities and vice versa (1987). 'Dark wood' is a generalized symbol used by many poets while representing the confusion and loneliness of life since it was mentioned in Dante's poem, 'The dark wood is the forest of the world of sense' (George, 1988). Once again the symbol 'snow' is hauled similarity with 'dark wood' as it is signifying the often encountered season 'winter' in the outside world where snow covers all tracks, blurs the roads, muffles every sound, conceals all colors resulting in universal whiteness, filled with the feeling of cosmic negation in action (Richardson, 1997). These thematic implications strongly resist the morbid attraction to all feasible passivity and simultaneously turning to the glory of duty and responsibility 'by invoking promises or mundane responsibilities' (Gray, 1990). Richard Gray, again mentions about the concluding lines that the repetition gives particular resonance which could after all be a metaphorical reference to the brief span of human life, inviting us to share in the experiences of seeing, feeling and thinking taking us away from tension and as well as offering pace through the thought of obligation (1990). Moreover, Robert Frost is conveying another message about the amazing beauty and stemming peace that come at the end of all tasks resembling the ultimate fulfillment of keeping all promises. Consequently, the theme 'duty' has got the unique honor of being the strongest weapon we can ever get to win pessimism and loneliness that is constantly felt in handling life chores. This poem is also called an excellent piece of 'interior monologue' recalling own unfinished obligations (Stevens, 2003).

Dumping the weary loneliness and annoyance of life, 'Gathering Leaves' is turning to the feeling of glorious fulfilled task. Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' and 'Gathering Leaves' can be called the two sides of a same coin since it is observed by a number of critics. Among them, Rafael Ibay observes that in the first one, the speaker speaks of 'promises to keep' signifying responsibility while the other one is much concerned to weigh the prospects of rest ([http://ayjw.org/print\\_articles.php?id=76432](http://ayjw.org/print_articles.php?id=76432)).

Both tasks and the positive spirit that comes out of task are having a logical reasoning in Frost's poetry where places of men connected to handsome obligations are of immense value. The setting of "Gathering Leaves" is obviously pastoral where a village alike the setting of 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' signifying the hard chores of life. According to John T. Ogilvie, the symbols 'village' and 'woods' are chronologically representing 'social obligations' and 'a world of perfect significance' (2006). Actually, often we all are lured by the solitude to get relief and to pause while the

continuous process of activity makes us pretty dull to proceed but Frost is using very simple diction to convey the urgency of works though they are ordinary, common and are needed to be done 'Again and again'. Although the 'woods are lovely, dark, and deep', even though it is much easier to watch the alluring beauty of 'woods fill up with snow', but the sparkling beauty of life exists in performing duty and keeping promises since echoing Lawrence Thompson, Rafael Ibay states, Frost has the inner feeling for living rather than having a life while the responsibilities of life are as light as the leaves.

## CONCLUSIONS

Frost's poetry is imbued with traces of tasks unfolding their urgency to human life, to mold it into the best. The transcendental pleasures, facts and celebrations of human life that can only come out of duty are apparent in his art. Frost's extremely optimistic belief can acutely snatch pessimism out of this material life since his creative excellence allows all the life chores to spark radiantly. Close study of his poetry brings the obvious truism of getting a pure position through labor as Robert Penn Warren also unfurls the fusions a person gets by dreaming of the fact (1947). Tiredness, pessimism, passivity and boredom are the darkest parts of human life since Nina Baym observes, "the human action in Frost's poetry is a repeated gesture of defiance" (721). But, Frost's poetry is to bring logical resonance as Patricia Wallace writes about his ideology, "you don't get the joys of solitude, the sweetness of it, without the responsibility of return" (12). So, eventually it can be noted that Frost's words are for hearing the next glorious echoes that comes out of uttering the simplest yet worthy sound 'duty'.

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